DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 770 HE 030 244

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TITLE	Why Students Leave Boise State University. Research Report 97-03.
INSTITUTION	Boise State Univ., Idaho.
PUB DATE	Apr 97
NOTE	14p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Dropouts; Education Work Relationship; Higher Education; Scheduling; *School Holding Power; *State Universities; *Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; Student Costs; Student Surveys
IDENTIFIERS	*Boise State University ID

ABSTRACT

This study examined the reasons why students enrolled at Boise State University (BSU) in Idaho during the Fall 1995 semester did not return for the Spring semester. A total of 443 students who did not return for the Spring semester were surveyed. The study found that BSU leavers were more likely than a national sample of college leavers to indicate that they left because of conflicts between the demands of a job and college (47 percent versus 31 percent), more likely to experience class scheduling problems (37 percent versus 18 percent), and less likely to leave because they decided to attend a different college (16 percent versus 30 percent). About 40 percent of the respondents indicated that they planned to return to BSU the following year, while almost 60 percent indicated that they planned to re-enroll at some point in time. The most often cited reasons for leaving BSU were conflict between demands of job and college (47 percent), inability to afford tuition and fees (35 percent), wanting a break from college studies (40 percent), class scheduling problems (37 percent), and unexpected expenses (32 percent). An appendix includes a copy of the student survey. (MDM)

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Why Students Leave Boise State University

Research Report 97-03

by:
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Coordinator
Institutional Assessment
and
The Retention Committee

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Boise State University
April 1997

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Abstract
Why Students Leave Boise State University

Why do students leave Boise State University? In order to answer that question, students who were enrolled in the Fall but not in the spring (and who did not graduate or were dismissed) were surveyed using an instrument developed by ACT.

At least 20% of the respondents indicated that the following were either major or minor reasons for not returning. The responses are ordered by means and the percent agreeing is listed in parentheses.

- Conflict between demands of job and college (47%)
- Tuition and fees were more than I could afford (35%)
- Wanted a break from my college studies (40%)
- Experienced class scheduling problems (37%)
- Encountered unexpected expenses (32%)
- Accepted a full-time job (28%)
- Family responsibilities were too great (31%)
- Disappointed with the quality of instruction at this college (26%)
- Dissatisfied with my grades (25%)
- Academic advising was inadequate (24%)
- Inadequate study habits (23%)

Results from other colleges who had used the ACT survey were also available for comparison. The three biggest differences between Boise State University students and others were in the areas of job conflicts, scheduling, and transfer. Boise State University leavers were:

- more likely to indicate that they left because of conflicts between the demands of job and college (47% vs. 31%)
- more likely to experience class scheduling problems (37% vs. 18%)
- less likely to leave because they decided to attend a different college (16% vs. 30%).

About 40% of the respondents planned to return to Boise State University this year, while almost 60% planned to re-enroll again at some point in time. Compared to all fall-term enrollees, respondents were more likely to be older and had not yet reached their senior year. There were no differences by gender or by full-time enrollment status.

Why Students Leave Boise State University

Why do students leave Boise State University? That was the question facing the Retention Committee. In order to answer it, 1,183 degree-seeking students enrolled in Fall 1995 but not in the spring (and who did not graduate or were dismissed) were randomly selected and surveyed using an instrument developed by ACT. Useable surveys were received from 443 or 37% of the group. The purpose of this report is to share the results of that survey. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Students who responded to the survey were mainly young (63% under 30), female, enrolled full-time, and either in their freshman or sophomore year. As shown by the table below, this is generally reflective of the University's degree-seekers, except that the general student body is younger (69% under 30) and has more seniors and graduate students. This may indicate that older students who are in the early stages of their college career are more likely to leave.

Table 1
Characteristics of Survey Respondents
and Fall 1996 Degree-seeking Enrollees

		Fall 1996 Enrollment	ACT Survey
Age	Under 20	16.9	11.3
	20 - 29	52.1	51.7
	30 - 39	16.8	19.3
	40 and up	14.2	17.7
Gender	Female	57.8	58.2
	Male	42.2	40.0
Enrollment	Full-time	58.4	58.2
	Part-time	41.6	41.8
Class Level	Freshman	27.2	29.3
	Sophomore	20.2	23.8
	Junior	15.3	19.0
	Senior	23.0	14.6
	Graduates/Prof	14.3	10.3
	Other/Unclassified	--	2.9

Certainly the survey results indicate that students have more than just academics on their minds. When asked to rate each of 48 items as a major reason for leaving (coded as a 3), a minor reason (coded as a 2), or not a reason (coded 1), students indicated they mainly left because of conflicts between the demands of job and college. Almost half (47%) of students indicated that this was a major or minor reason for leaving. A second reason was that students left because tuition and fees were more than they could afford. This outranked the reasons in third and fourth place—wanting a break from college studies and experiencing class scheduling problems—because of the number of students indicating this was a major reason for leaving. Further details can be found in Table 2.

Table 2
Reasons for Leaving College

Item	*BSU*		*National*	
	Average	*% Selecting as Reason*	*Average*	*% Selecting as Reason*
Conflict between demands of job and college	*1.72*	*47%*	*1.50*	*31%*
Tuition and fees were more than I could afford	*1.55*	*35%*	*1.36*	*23%*
Wanted a break from my college studies	*1.52*	*40%*	*1.36*	*27%*
Experienced class scheduling problems	*1.51*	*37%*	*1.25*	*18%*
Encountered unexpected expenses	1.46	32%	1.36	25%
Accepted a Full-time job	1.45	28%	1.35	21%
Family responsibilities were too great	1.43	31%	1.38	25%
Disappointed with the quality of instruction at this college	*1.36*	*26%*	*1.22*	*16%*
Dissatisfied with my grades	1.35	25%	1.34	24%
Academic advising was inadequate	1.33	24%	1.23	16%
Health-related problem (family or personal)	*1.29*	*17%*	*1.41*	*24%*
Decided to attend a different college	*1.28*	*16%*	*1.52*	*30%*
Inadequate study habits	1.28	23%	1.26	20%
Impersonal attitudes of college faculty or staff	*1.26*	*17%*	*1.15*	*11%*
Experienced emotional problems	1.25	18%	1.30	21%
Applied for financial aid, but did not receive it	1.23	15%	1.17	11%
Wanted to move to (or was transferred to) a new location	*1.20*	*12%*	*1.35*	*21%*
Desired major was not offered by this college	1.20	14%	1.24	15%
Uncertain about the value of a college education	1.19	15%	1.11	9%

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Item	*BSU*		*National*	
	Average	*% Selecting as Reason*	*Average*	*% Selecting as Reason*
Desired major was offered, but course content was unsatisfactory	1.19	13%	1.13	10%
Dissatisfied with the academic reputation of this college	***1.18***	***13%***	***1.07***	***6%***
Marital situation changed my educational plans	1.18	12%	1.15	10%
Wanted to get work experience	1.18	14%	1.20	14%
Did not budget my money correctly	1.17	14%	1.16	12%
Cost of living was too high in this community	1.17	13%	1.09	6%
Financial aid received was inadequate	1.16	11%	1.16	11%
Unhappy with college rules and regulations	1.15	11%	1.10	8%
Too many required courses	1.15	12%	1.13	10%
Felt alone or isolated	1.15	11%	1.14	11%
Commuting distance to this college was too great	1.14	11%	1.16	11%
My chosen occupation did not require more college	1.14	9%	1.10	7%
Learned all I wanted to learn at this time	1.13	9%	1.16	10%
Wanted to travel	1.13	10%	1.11	8%
Courses were too difficult	1.12	10%	1.12	9%
Child care was not available or was too costly	1.11	7%	1.08	6%
Dissatisfied with the social life at this college	1.10	8%	1.15	11%
Did not like the size of this college	1.10	7%	1.11	9%
Was suspended or placed on probation	1.09	5%	1.07	5%
Courses were not challenging	1.09	7%	1.10	8%
Wanted to live nearer to my parents or love ones	1.07	5%	1.17	12%
Difficulty in obtaining transportation to this college	1.07	5%	1.12	9%
Influenced by parents or relatives	1.06	4%	1.11	9%
Had conflicts with my roommate(s)	1.06	4%	1.06	5%
Could not find part-time work at this college	1.05	4%	1.08	6%
Could not obtain summer employment	1.04	2%	1.04	3%
Could not find housing I liked	1.03	2%	1.05	4%
Felt racial/ethnic tension	1.03	2%	1.04	3%
Inadequate facilities for physically handicapped students	1.01	1%	1.02	1%

Note: Items where a difference of more than 0.1 in BSU and National average occur have been italicized and bolded.

Are these results similar to those received by other institutions who have given the survey to non-returning students? Findings suggest that Boise State University has some different issues

compared to these other institutions. For the top four reasons listed by Boise State University students, only 18-31% of other students selected these as reasons for leaving compared to 35-47% of BSU students. While conflicts between the demands of job and college was ranked second by students nationally, the number one reason for leaving was that students decided to attend a different college. At Boise State, this reason had a mean rank of 12th, probably because our students are place-bound and lack the choices that students in more populated areas have. Other reasons included in the top four nationally were leaving because of health related problems and/or because family responsibilities became too great, reasons which had ranks of 11th and 7th respectively at BSU.

In fact, if a difference between means of more than 0.1 is taken as significant, there are differences between Boise State University and the national group on 10 items. These items have been placed in bold and italicized on Table 2. In addition to the reasons already mentioned, Boise State University respondents were more likely to indicate the following were reasons for leaving: disappointment with the quality of instruction, impersonal attitudes of college faculty or staff, and dissatisfaction with the University's academic reputation. They were less likely to mention moving as a reason for leaving. It should be recognized, however, that the national data is not necessarily reflective of the "average" institution nationally. Rather, it is simply a grouping of data from institutions ranging from public to private and from community college to research university. Perusal of the institutions included in the data set also indicate that many are located in the mid-West rather than the western portions of the country.

So what's next for Boise State University leavers? About 40% of the students indicated that within the next year they planned to either enroll again in college or obtain a job and enroll in college. Most of the remainder either planned just to work (37%) or care for their home and family (8%). Almost 60% planned to return to Boise State University at some point in time; only 15% were sure they would return. See Table 3 for further details.

Table 3
Future Plans

Plans for the coming year	N	Percentage
Work full time/part time	159	37.1
Enroll in college	80	18.6
Obtain a job and enroll in college	92	21.4
Care for a home/family	33	7.7
Other	25	5.8
Undecided	40	9.3
Blank	14	N/A
Plan to re-enroll at this college?		
Yes	256	58.3
Undecided	116	26.4
No	67	15.3
Blank	4	N/A

These findings show that students leave Boise State for many reasons, and some of them are beyond the control of the University. In addition, most former students believe they are likely to return to the University at some future point in time. Despite this, however, there are areas where the University could take some steps that might lead to improved retention. These include attention to issues such as class scheduling, quality of instruction, academic advising, and a campus climate described by some as too impersonal. Efforts are already underway in some areas (e.g., academic advising), but further attention could only benefit Boise State University and the students it serves.

APPENDIX A

WITHDRAWING/NONRETURNING STUDENT SURVEY
(SHORT FORM)

DIRECTIONS: The information you supply on this questionnaire will be kept completely confidential. However, if any item requests information that you do not wish to provide, please feel free to omit it. Your Social Security number is requested for research purposes only and will not be listed on any report.

Please use a soft (No. 1 or 2) lead pencil to fill in the oval indicating your response. DO NOT use a ball-point pen, nylon-tip or felt-tip pen, fountain pen, marker, or colored pencil. Some items may not be applicable to you or to this college. If this is the case, skip the item or mark the "Does Not Apply" option. If you wish to change your response to an item, erase your first mark completely and then blacken the correct oval. Select only ONE response to each item.

PAGE 1 USE A SOFT LEAD PENCIL ONLY

APPENDIX A

SECTION I—BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Begin by writing your Social Security number in the large boxes at the top of Block A. Then, in the column below each box, blacken the appropriate oval. Complete the remaining blocks by blackening the single most appropriate oval in each case.

A — SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (Identification Number)

B — AGE

- 18 or under
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23 to 25
- 26 to 29
- 30 to 39
- 40 to 61
- 62 or over

C — RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP

- Afro-American or Black
- Native American (Indian, Alaskan, Hawaiian)
- Caucasian or White
- Mexican-American, Mexican Origin
- Asian American, Oriental, Pacific Islander
- Puerto Rican, Cuban, Other Latino or Hispanic
- Other
- I prefer not to respond

D — WHAT WAS YOUR FINAL CLASS LEVEL AT THIS COLLEGE?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate or Professional Student
- Special Student
- Other/Unclassified
- Does Not Apply to This College

E — FOR WHAT PURPOSE DID YOU ENTER THIS COLLEGE? (Select Only One)

- No Definite Purpose in Mind
- To Take a Few Job-Related Courses
- To Take a Few Courses for Self-Improvement
- To Take Courses Necessary for Transferring to Another College
- To Obtain or Maintain a Certification
- To Complete a Vocational/Technical Program
- To Obtain an Associate Degree
- To Obtain a Bachelor's Degree
- To Obtain a Master's Degree
- To Obtain a Doctorate or a Professional Degree

F — WHAT WAS YOUR PRIMARY ENROLLMENT STATUS AT THIS COLLEGE?

- Full-Time Student
- Part-Time Student

G — WHAT TYPE OF SCHOOL DID YOU ATTEND JUST PRIOR TO ENTERING THIS COLLEGE?

- High School
- Vocational/Technical School
- 2-Year College
- 4-Year College or University
- Graduate/Professional College
- Other

H — SEX

- Male
- Female

I — MARITAL STATUS

- Unmarried (Including Single, Divorced, and Widowed)
- Married
- Separated
- Prefer Not to Respond

J — WHAT TYPE OF TUITION DID YOU PAY AT THIS COLLEGE?

- In-State Tuition
- Out-of-State Tuition
- Does Not Apply to This College

K — WHAT WAS YOUR RESIDENCE CLASSIFICATION AT THIS COLLEGE?

- In-State Student
- Out-of-State Student
- International Student (Not U.S. Citizen)

L — WHAT ONE RESPONSE BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PLANS FOR THIS COMING YEAR?

- Work Full Time or Part Time
- Enroll in College
- Obtain a Job and Enroll in College
- Care for a Home and/or Family
- Other
- Undecided

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M — INDICATE YOUR MOST RECENT COLLEGE RESIDENCE

- College Residence Hall
- Fraternity or Sorority House
- College Married Student Housing
- Off-Campus Room or Apartment
- Home of Parents or Relative
- Own Home
- Other

N — DO YOU PLAN TO RE-ENROLL AT THIS COLLEGE?

- Yes
- Undecided
- No

SECTION II—ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

IF AN ADDITIONAL SET OF MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS IS INCLUDED WITH THIS FORM, PLEASE USE THIS SECTION TO RECORD YOUR RESPONSES.

TWELVE OVALS ARE PROVIDED FOR EACH QUESTION, BUT FEW QUESTIONS REQUIRE THAT MANY CHOICES. SIMPLY IGNORE THE EXTRA OVALS.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b
c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c
d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d
e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e
f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f
g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g	g
h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h
i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j	j
k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k
l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l	l

A-1

DO NOT TEAR OR STAPLE THIS FORM

SECTION III—REASONS FOR LEAVING THIS COLLEGE

Listed below are a number of reasons why a student might leave college. Please blacken the oval indicating whether each of the reasons listed was a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason that you decided to leave this college.

		MAJOR REASON	MINOR REASON	NOT A REASON
PERSONAL	1 Learned all I wanted to learn at this time	O	O	O
	2 Decided to attend a different college	O	O	O
	3 Health-related problem (family or personal)	O	O	O
	4 Wanted a break from my college studies	O	O	O
	5 Wanted to move to (or was transferred to) a new location	O	O	O
	6 Marital situation changed my educational plans	O	O	O
	7 Difficulty in obtaining transportation to this college	O	O	O
	8 Uncertain about the value of a college education	O	O	O
	9 Commuting distance to this college was too great	O	O	O
	10 Child care was not available or was too costly	O	O	O
	11 Family responsibilities were too great	O	O	O
	12 Did not like the size of this college	O	O	O
	13 Experienced emotional problems	O	O	O
	14 Felt racial/ethnic tension	O	O	O
	15 Felt alone or isolated	O	O	O
	16 Influenced by parents or relatives	O	O	O
	17 Had conflicts with my roommate(s)	O	O	O
	18 Wanted to live nearer to my parents or loved ones	O	O	O
	19 Wanted to travel	O	O	O
ACADEMIC	20 Dissatisfied with my grades	O	O	O
	21 Was suspended or placed on probation	O	O	O
	22 Courses were too difficult	O	O	O
	23 Courses were not challenging	O	O	O
	24 Inadequate study habits	O	O	O
	25 Too many required courses	O	O	O
	26 Disappointed with the quality of instruction at this college	O	O	O
INSTITUTIONAL	27 Desired major was not offered by this college	O	O	O
	28 Desired major was offered, but course content was unsatisfactory	O	O	O
	29 Academic advising was inadequate	O	O	O
	30 Experienced class scheduling problems	O	O	O
	31 Dissatisfied with the academic reputation of this college	O	O	O
	32 Could not find housing I liked	O	O	O
	33 Unhappy with college rules and regulations	O	O	O
	34 Impersonal attitudes of college faculty or staff	O	O	O
	35 Dissatisfied with the social life at this college	O	O	O
	36 Inadequate facilities for physically handicapped students	O	O	O
FINANCIAL	37 Did not budget my money correctly	O	O	O
	38 Encountered unexpected expenses	O	O	O
	39 Applied for financial aid, but did not receive it	O	O	O
	40 Financial aid received was inadequate	O	O	O
	41 Tuition and fees were more than I could afford	O	O	O
	42 Could not find part-time work at this college	O	O	O
	43 Could not obtain summer employment	O	O	O
	44 Cost of living was too high in this community	O	O	O
EMPLOYMENT	45 Wanted to get work experience	O	O	O
	46 Accepted a full-time job	O	O	O
	47 Conflict between demands of job and college	O	O	O
	48 My chosen occupation did not require more college	O	O	O

Please reexamine your major reasons for leaving this college, and indicate the single most important reason by completely blackening the circle containing the number of that reason. For example, if your most important reason for leaving college was "19 Wanted to travel," you would blacken the circle containing the number "19" as illustrated below. (Blacken only one circle.)

● Wanted to travel	●	O	O